

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader is recognized.

PROGRESS TOWARD A PERMANENT IRAQI GOVERNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, freedom took another important step forward this past Saturday in Iraq. Last December, we witnessed millions of free and brave Iraqi citizens defy the terrorist death threats and go to the polls to elect a parliament. Since that election, Iraqi political leaders have been hard at work forging a government that reflects the will of the Iraqi people.

This Saturday—unfortunately, it took a while to get there—we were finally able to celebrate the good news. Iraqis have made major progress toward achieving the goal of having a government in place. Iraqi political leaders reached an important agreement for the top leadership post for a national unity government.

Iraq will retain the experienced hand of Jalal Talabani as President, and the new Prime Minister Jawad al-Maliki appears to be a reformer, respected by all sides, who will hopefully have the credibility and the authority to shape a strong government with the power to take on the major issues facing that country.

The new Iraqi leadership has the will of the people at its back. They understand that democracy requires the courage to reach consensus. Over the next 30 days, they must fill the remaining slots of the cabinet and begin to address the challenges that grip that country.

Freedom and stability in Iraq is bad news for the terrorists. A stable, strong Iraq will unite its people against continued violence. A stable, strong Iraq will be an ally in the war on terror and a beacon of democracy in the Middle East. A stable, strong Iraq that cracks down on the terrorists in its midst will make the region and the world more secure.

Aside from the Iraqis themselves, much credit for this triumph in Iraq goes to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Her skillful diplomacy appears to have been a crucial ingredient in breaking the logjam.

Much credit also goes to our U.S. Ambassador there, Zalmay Khalilzad, for his tireless efforts. And, of course, President Bush's continuing resolve to defy terrorism and terrorist-friendly regimes and to support freedom and democracy has inspired and strengthened everyone in the process.

As we celebrate the victory in Iraq, we are mindful that much hard work certainly lies ahead. Terrorist violence in Iraq continues. Some say the momentum from the three successful elections of last year each one drawing greater levels of turnout than the one before has been squandered with the last 4 months of political bickering. The new Iraq leaders must be sure not

to squander any more by failing to assemble a government in a timely manner.

Although we are cautious, I think we should also be optimistic. America will continue to stand beside Iraq in the days ahead. I remind anyone who thinks this new government took too long to form that America also had a rocky start at its beginning. People forget that from the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution was 11 years, and from the Declaration of Independence until George Washington actually took office was 13 years.

Freedom, however, is worth the wait. The incoming Prime Minister appears to understand that he must form a consensus government, one that must reach out to Iraq's many ethnic and religious groups as his country begins its journey of democracy.

I was heartened by the promise he made this weekend. Here is what he had to say. He said:

We are going to form a family that will not be based on sectarian or ethnic backgrounds. . . . Those who take responsibility in the new government will be representing the people, not their parties.

The new Prime Minister, al-Maliki, has the right attitude, and that attitude should continue to guide the new government in the days ahead.

I know my colleagues will join me in congratulating the people of Iraq for spurning the terrorists and continuing down the road to democracy.

Most of all, I wish to express my profound gratitude for our troops in Iraq. It has been their strength and courage that has made progress on the road to freedom possible.

HEAD START IN MONTANA

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, each year since 1988, April 21 has been designated as Youth Service Day. This day is especially important for a group of Montanans in Billings, MT, who have been working with children since 1966. On April 21, the staff of Head Start, Inc. in Billings celebrated their 40th anniversary. I rise today to congratulate them on their past efforts and to express my support for another 40 years of service.

We have all seen the positive impact that Head Start has on children and families throughout Montana. This Federal program provides child and family development services by helping children under the age of 5 to develop the skills they will use throughout their formal education and for the rest of their lives. Head Start in Billings was recently recognized as among the top 2 percent of Head Start programs nationwide. Their continued dedication to excellence is deserving of recognition and praise, and I am honored to rise on their behalf.

While celebrating this milestone of service to Montana, these dedicated staff members recognized a very special volunteer named Thelma Adolph. Thelma, who volunteers through Head Start's Foster Grandparents program,

has given her time for 20 straight years. She has touched the lives of countless children, and it is no exaggeration to say that the world is a better place because of her. Such dedication is all the more impressive because Thelma is 93 years old.

And so, I ask my colleagues to share my gratitude for the efforts, dedication and excellence of Head Start and Thelma Adolph. I thank them all for their hard work and dedication on behalf of Montana's children.

91ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge and commemorate April 24, 2005, the 91st anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian genocide. I do so because I believe it is necessary to recognize and ensure that similar atrocities do not happen in the future.

No one knows this better than the 500,000 Armenians who are living in my home State of California. These men, women, and children are a shining example of the backbone of our society and serve as a symbol of perseverance and determination.

Their ancestors came to our country to build a better life for themselves and their families, and today, Armenian-Americans recognize that the repercussions of allowing aggression and injustice against ethnic, religious, or minority groups to persist can be dire.

During the Armenian genocide, which took place between 1915 and 1923, over a million Armenians were killed, and another 500,000 were driven from their homes.

We must never again allow a human tragedy to occur on this scale. It is unacceptable to witness thousands of innocent victims suffer and die without taking any action.

And I know this issue not only resonates with the Armenians in California but with everyone in the country. Every day, numerous constituents from different backgrounds call my office asking what Congress and the administration are doing to prevent genocide from occurring again.

It is absolutely essential that we do not let history repeat itself. We can—and we must—do better.

The Armenian-American community knows this all too well and today, we stand with them in commemorating the start of the Armenian genocide. So let us renew our commitment to support those around the world who face persecution and even death simply because of who they are. We will never forget the Armenian genocide, and we look to the present and future with a newfound sense of hope and optimism so that we may have the strength to stand up and prevent such atrocities.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I take this opportunity to commemorate the 91st anniversary of the Armenian genocide on April 24th. This anniversary offers an opportunity for us to renew our